A lion among the roosters

Arriving in Wisconsin in 1957, Louvanist Joseph Binard is a lion who appreciates the company of his neighbors, the Walloon roosters.

Samuel Husquin | Journalist | 07/25/2014

The Lion of Flanders flies proudly over this impeccably manicured patch of grass. Even on Belgian Days. "We also just celebrated the Flemish Community Festival," smiles Joe Binard. This renowned urologist arrived in the USA in 1957 to continue his scientific research. "I started seeing patients in this region of Wisconsin, and that's how I connected with this Belgian community. My grandfather was Walloon." The doctor settled in Brussels, in the most black-yellow-red peninsula in the USA.

The man is also at the heart of the renewed contacts between the "cousins" and their "Old Country". "In the sixties, several people asked me to organize a trip to Belgium for them. I had more contacts and connections in Flanders. And that's how I found them a very cheap hotel on the Coast (Editor's note: at the... Coq) . As soon as they arrived, you know the Belgians, all the participants went straight to the hotel bar. They ordered and chatted in Walloon. And they were completely disappointed to see that we didn't understand them." Belgian is no longer spoken in the old country, one of them had sighed. And then there is the story of this teacher from Namur who met them almost by chance and who strongly advised them to head to Namur if they wanted to speak Walloon. "What we also forget is that at the same time (Editor's note: the 1850s) there was also a Flemish emigration, coming from the region of Heverlee and Leuven and who also arrived in this region of Wisconsin. But these families tended to stay in Green Bay where they integrated completely. I have already had discussions with some of them. I point out to them that they have Flemish ancestors. They tell me that they don't know if they are of Flemish or Dutch origin. That makes me a little angry and I tell them: it's not the same thing! It's as different as being a supporter of the Green Bay Packers or the Chicago Bears!"